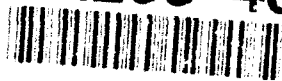


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**SURPRISE AND DECEPTION
IN THE EARLY WAR YEARS,
1940-1942**

BY

COLONEL ROBERT REUSS
United States Army

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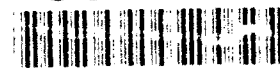
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SURPRISE AND DECEPTION IN THE EARLY WAR YEARS, 1940-1942

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel Robert Reuss
United States Army

Professor Douglas H. Dearth
Project Advisor

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ABSTRACT

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All opening gambits in WW II were initiated by surprise (Denmark and Norway, France and the Low Countries, Russia and Pearl Harbor). The early war period provides an excellent laboratory for the study of the art of surprise and deception and offers many lessons for today's military planner. Surprise and, to a lesser degree, deception have long been recognized as elements of combat power. This study examines surprise and deception from the perspective of major military operations and campaigns with specific focus on the North Africa Campaign between 1940 and 1942. This was the first active theater of war for the Allies, and surprise and deception were frequently used by both sides. This study examines selected key battles of the North African Campaign, focusing on the achievement of surprise through deception. The scope of this effort includes the doctrinal thinking and development that occurred during the inter-war period and presents theories which show a relationship between that preparation and successes in the Campaign. The author suggests that the lessons learned from this critical period in history are relevant for contemporary military thinking.

INTRODUCTION

"Surprise was the foundation of almost all the grand strategical combinations of the past, as it will be of those to come."¹

Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, 1902 "War"

"If surprise is indeed the most important 'key to victory,' then stratagem (deception) is the key to surprise."²

Barton Whaley, 1969 "Stratagem:
Deception and Surprise in War"

The positive impact of one's ability to achieve surprise in the conduct of war is a widely known and accepted fact. Warfare is replete with examples of the advantage that surprise has afforded the combatant who has effectively caught his opponent unaware or unprepared. Numerous noted students of the art of warfare, from Sun Tzu to Liddell Hart, have cited in their writings the benefits of achieving surprise and have strongly advocated using surprise in the conduct of warfare. Others, equally as notable, like Clausewitz and Jomini, were somewhat negative about surprise and deception at the lower levels of war and therefore discounted its importance in their works.³ This study will attempt to highlight several points with regard to this subject. First - the doctrinal theory that supports both surprise and deception. Second - to provide an explanation or rationale for the varied differences of opinion regarding the value of surprise and deception. Third - using the North African Campaign in World War II as a backdrop. illustrate how pre-war thinking and doctrinal development concerning surprise and deception⁴ influenced

many of the great successes in that campaign. Finally - to argue that the achievement of surprise through deception has often altered the course of warfare to the extent that it deserves more serious consideration for modern combat operations.

The study of historical examples of surprise and deception might well be argued by some as serving little purpose for the modern battlefield. The sophistication of high-tech intelligence gathering means, found in great numbers throughout the world today, might certainly be capable of exposing any such effort. A parallel of this view can be drawn from a United States doctrinal guideline of nearly 60 years ago, published just as the war clouds were gathering for the Second World War. It was at this juncture that the advancement of aerial observation and the advent of wireless communication had brought an end to the era when surprise and deception were possible.⁵

The First World War provides similar examples of the importance of the study of history for relevant theories of surprise and deception. As Field Marshal Wavell instructs us in his description of General Edmund Allenby: "His skill in planning and in deceiving the enemy was not the result of sudden flashes of inspiration but of much reading and study of past campaigns and of present conditions."⁶ Allenby, as the Commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force during the Palestine Campaign of the First World War, gained fame as a noted deception practitioner at the battles of Third Gaza and Megiddo. His original and novel deception concepts were tremendously successful in breaking the deadlock of the campaign for the British. Allenby learned his trade from the

accounts of Confederate Civil War General "Stonewall" Jackson and refined them in the Boer War under the tutelage of Colonel G. F. R Henderson.⁷ Henderson, who was Lord Roberts' intelligence officer in the Boer War, was a student of the American Civil War and especially the "highly unorthodox Stonewall Jackson". Henderson offers that: "If the campaigns of the great masters of war are examined, . . . they. . . by one means or another, or by creating false impressions, . . . induced him (the enemy) to make a false step, and to place himself in a position which made it easy for them (great masters) to attain their object(ive)".⁸ Clearly, as shown by these examples, the value of surprise and deception has always violated conventual wisdom. As recently as the Gulf War, one can find examples of very successful campaigns which were waged utilizing surprise and deception techniques.

All opening gambits in WW II were initiated by surprise (Denmark & Norway, France and the Low Countries, Russia and Pearl Harbor), and most historians allow that the early war period provides an excellent laboratory for the study of the art of surprise and deception and offers many lessons for today's military planner. North Africa was the first active theater of war for the Allies where surprise and deception theory was frequently employed by both sides. The methodology of this study will be to scrutinize selected battles of the North Africa Campaign between 1940 and 1942, where strategic or operational deception influenced the outcome. Using the framework of the doctrinal thinking and developmental theories of the inter-war period, the author will demonstrate a relationship between that preparation and successes

in subsequent campaigns. The analysis will attempt to gain a better understanding of the political and military situation which prompted the extensive use of surprise and deception in those early years of the Second World War. The purpose is to establish that a resurrection of the type of thinking which was sustained by so few during the inter-war period but served so many, might better prepare this nation for the next war.

SURPRISE AND DECEPTION THEORY

This study will examine surprise and deception from the perspective of major military operations and campaigns. Most would agree that these two subjects are closely linked and must be considered collectively. More appropriately they should be considered as nested concepts, which can be easily demonstrated by the fact, that a successful deception effort nearly always leads to the achievement of surprise. Even Clausewitz, who does not consider deception as a general theory of war, states: "Each surprise action is rooted in some degree of cunning (deception)."⁹ A further understanding of some common terminology is necessary to expand the discussion of this study.

Surprise can be viewed simply as doing the unexpected to gain an advantage. At the strategic level there are three types of surprise: diplomatic, technological and military. This study will limit its consideration to the latter. Michael Handel provides this thought on strategic military surprise: "a successful unanticipated attack will facilitate the destruction of a sizeable portion of the

enemy's force at a lower cost to the attacker by throwing the inherently stronger defense psychologically off balance."¹⁰ Strategic military surprise probably achieved its greatest level of recognition during the Second World War, where nearly all the major participants successfully employed the practice in one form or another. The analysis of this crucial period is the focus and foundation for this effort.

Deception is a means to an end: surprise. Herbig and Daniel suggest that: "Deception constitutes the deliberate misrepresentation of reality to gain a competitive advantage."¹¹ They postulate that deception is a broad concept which consists of cover, lying, and artifice. Cover, or hiding the truth, is at the heart of the concept. If nothing else is achieved, at least the cover must stand. Lying is a means of protecting the truth as well as representing the false, and artifice is involved in portraying false or insincere behavior. The three are clearly linked and constitute the model of a total deception concept. The two common types of deception are most easily viewed at the end points of a continuum. A-type is "ambiguity producing", by which the target is given multiple choices among which one may be the real truth. The second type is "misleading" or M-type deception, which has as its aim to present a single false version of the truth. This type is generally more difficult to achieve.¹² Deception can assume an active or passive form. Passive deception are those actions which hide or protect the true, while the active form misrepresents what is real. Herbig and Daniel conclude that complete deception conditions the

target to believe what is being portrayed; influences the targets actions; and provides a clear benefit to the deceiver.¹³

An additional term which may be helpful in the study of this topic is a traditional but little used military term - Stratagem. This 14th century term in its original form was a solely military term which was synonymous with strategic military deception. In modern usage it is an artifice or trick in war for deceiving and outwitting the enemy. Like the practice, the term has fallen in and out of use during the last century.

Several key elements contribute to a successful deception operation. A brief description of these may be helpful at this point of the study:

- Intelligence provides the basis for determining the target of the effort, how the deception will be portrayed, and how well it is being received. It must be remembered that enemy intelligence is always working against the deception, and the better their capability the more difficult the effort.

- Time is essential for a strategic deception operation. From start-to-finish the planning, execution, monitoring and feedback effort is an elaborate and detailed process. Shortcuts usually meet with disaster.

- Security is paramount for protecting the true.

- Operations and Intelligence collaboration is a critical factor, with the lead in the hands of the former.

- Leaders need to be imaginative and open to new ideas.

- Weakness and vulnerability are the normal catalyst for active deception efforts. Historically it has worked best for the underdog.

THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF SURPRISE AND DECEPTION

"All warfare is based on deception."¹⁴

Sun Tzu, 4th Century, B. C. "The Art of War"

"Analogous things in war -- plans and orders issued for appearances only, false reports designed to confuse the enemy, etc. -- have as a rule little strategic value"¹⁵

Clausewitz, 19th century, A. D., "On War"

Throughout history, the theories of surprise and deception have received varying degrees of treatment from military theoreticians. The value of surprise has been routinely credited as a major element of military theory and normally elevated to the position of a "principle of the war". Deception on the other hand, while equally evident in warfare from the earliest time, has never received an appropriate level of emphasis. The reason for this less than adequate treatment is unclear; and without a consistent audit trail and only rare analytical surveys to examine, deception's place in formal military doctrine is understandably only intermittent.

Sun Tzu, one of the earliest writers of military doctrine, stresses surprise and deception as a fundamental component of war. His classic The Art of War provides numerous examples of the

importance of deception and achieving surprise. Samuel Griffith states that: "The strategic and tactical doctrines expounded in 'The Art of War' are based on deception, the creation of false appearances to mystify and delude the enemy, the indirect approach, ready adaptability to the enemy situation . . . , and speedy concentration against points of weakness."¹⁶ The influence of his works can be found throughout the Far East and was used extensively by the Mongol-Tatars and was strongly evident in Japanese military thought. The theories of Mao Tse-Tung and even Russia (later the Soviet Union) were strongly influenced by this work. His influence in the West was less profound, primarily due to the absence of a full translation of the effort until early in the 20th century. As Liddell Hart puts it, "The clarity of Sun Tzu's thought could have corrected the obscurity of Clausewitz's."¹⁷

Very few references to the use of surprise and deception can be found in Europe during the Middle Ages. Only Machiavelli, in his writings can be credited with specific thoughts on the subject. His theory, one that clearly supported preservation of force, suggested that a wise commander, "never attempt to win by force . . . what he was able to win by fraud."¹⁸

The European continental campaigns of the 18th century illustrate many uses of surprise and deception to the modern historian. Great commanders of the era, such as Marshal Maurice de Saxe of France, Frederick the Great of Prussia and Napoleon Bonaparte made frequent and effective employment of ruses, stratagems and feints at every stage of each campaign. A detailed analysis though, rarely appears in any coherent fashion, in the

accounts from the period.¹⁹ Jomini, who draws extensively from this period, paid little attention to the achievement of surprise through deception as a general theory of war. Clausewitz, who is generally misinterpreted by his disciples on this subject, offers that: "Surprise lies at the foundation of all undertakings without exception," and that "there is a degree of stratagem, be it ever so small, which lies at the foundation of every attempt to surprise".²⁰ Clausewitz and Jomini had such a profound impact on European military operations in the 19th and early 20th century that there is little wonder why that period of history reflects relatively few accounts of the use of these principles. Rare exceptions include the exploits of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson, during the American Civil War and Lord Roberts in the Boer War. These "Great Stratagem Captains" along with but few others, provided their followers a means to keep the kindling smoldering for the those soon-to-be great players in the First and Second World Wars.

The Twentieth Century has a period in which the practice of deception to achieve surprise has flourished. Barton Whaley in his exhaustive analysis of 168 battles from 16 wars of the 20th century, concluded that deception was a force multiplier, even when employed to a minor extent. In the majority of the cases he studied, deception positively affected the outcome and saved time, effort and lives.²¹

DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Doctrine can be described as a stable body of principles rooted in military experience and capable of providing a foundation for the

development of additional tactics, techniques and procedures. Simply speaking, doctrine bridges the gap between theory and practice.²² This section will look at four of the major participants in World War II and their efforts during the inter-war period to establish a doctrinal bases for the employment of surprise and deception during the war.

The British

"After the Meinertzhagen success, deceptions, which for the ordinary general were just witty hors d'oeuvres before battle, became for Allenby a main point of strategy."²³

T. E. Lawrence, 1921, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*.

The British, who by the end of the Second World War became the unquestioned masters of the surprise-through-deception trade, began the century without a standard approach to the art. The British had their share of great captains of deception, such as the Duke of Marlborough from the 18th Century who was Winston Churchill's ancestor and the object of his intense study on the subject of deception;²⁴ and Wellington, whom Colonel G. F. R. Henderson characterized as the master of surprise-through-deception in the 19th century.²⁵ The accounts of these early deception practitioners were not widely distributed; the normal means of transferring the skill was from teacher to student. The Jominian and Clausewitzian schools of military thought tended to provide the basis for British doctrine and dominated the military

thinkers of the era. Colonel Henderson was a 19th century military writer, who himself was a practitioner of the art and the first to describe the methods of these masters of stratagem for future readers. His studies of the American Civil War and Stonewall Jackson provided the inspiration to pass on his skill to a young Major Edmund Allenby during the Boer War.²⁶

Allenby became Commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine, in June 1917, with the British effort at a standstill. Allenby's plan to break the stalemate at Gaza included an elaborate deception scheme aimed at misleading the defending forces. Included in the plan was a deception concept that came to be called the "Haversack Ruse". This deliberate loss of a haversack, filled with critical operational documents, was a major success and was copied on several occasions in the Second World War.²⁷ With Allenby acting as the teacher, and another young British officer, Wavell as the student, the British appeared to have the linkage that would launch them into the Second World War.²⁸

During the 1920's and 1930's, Wavell refined his techniques while assigned as commander of the 6th Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Armored Division in Aldershot. His use of the tricks he had acquired from Allenby gave him a distinct and apparent advantage over his fellow commanders, during the training maneuvers held there.²⁹ He revived the "haversack ruse" on at least two occasions and as a result soundly defeated his opponents. He later recalled: "(an) advantage I gained was by paying more attention to Intelligence arrangements than other commanders, both in the matter of

obtaining information and in getting false information to the enemy."³⁰

Wavell's skills, knowledge and experience should have formed the basis of British surprise-through-deception doctrine during the inter-war period. However, just as in the era before World War I, the technique had fallen out of favor, was not promulgated as doctrine, and generally was lost to common practice. Once again the knowledge and experience of the past really resided with just one man. The principles that Wavell gained from Allenby, would prove to be highly beneficial for the Allied Forces in the African Desert Campaign and we shall see provide the basis for an elaborate string of surprise-through-deception operations throughout World War II. The immediate value of his experience would be demonstrated in December 1941, at the battle of Sidi Barrani, where General Wavell used deception to defeat a much larger force and give Great Britain its first major victory of the Second World War. This battle will be examined in detail in a subsequent section of this study.

David Mure, in his book Master of Deception, grants that General Sir Archibald Wavell was the father of modern deception, and that the personally selected heir to his craft was Brigadier General Dudley Clarke.³¹ Clarke was "no ordinary man;" indeed, he was credited by Field Marshal Alexander as having "done as much to win the war as any other officer."³² "A" Force, a brainchild of Wavell and Clarke, was the remarkable organization that masterminded numerous successful cover and deception operations throughout the Middle East, culminating in the second battle for El Alamein in

October 1942. After El Alamein, "A" Force, operating directly under the London Controlling Section, brilliantly supported the invasion of Sicily in 1943 and for D-Day in 1944. The deception devices developed and so successfully employed by "A" Force in the North African Theater became the basis for future British and American efforts. Clarke and "A" Force also pioneered the basic techniques for using double agents in support of deception operations.

Churchill, more than any other strategic leader of the era, understood the value of intelligence and had a genuine interest in outwitting the other guy. He viewed war as a game where trickery and subterfuge added to the fun of the sport.³³ His experiences from the Boer and the Great War taught him that deception could not only save immediate casualties, but could prevent the type of extended conflict he had experienced throughout the war. He would be the inspiration and the driving force behind most of the allied cover and deception operations. His political-military emphasis for the subject was clearly professed at the Teheran Conference of 1943, when he asserted that: "truth is so precious that she should always be attended by bodyguard of lies."³⁴

The Americans

"Always mystify, mislead and surprise the enemy, if possible; if you strike and overcome him, never give up the pursuit as long as your men have the strength to follow."³⁵

Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, 1862,
Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War.

Historically and with only a few minor exceptions, Americans have not believed in the value of deception. The most remarkable of these was General "Stonewall" Jackson, whose contributions were so significant that they were to provide the background for the British stratagem efforts in the Boer War and the First World War.³⁶ Jackson was always outnumbered, yet through the skillful employment of security and deception he would consistently surprise the Union forces.

The "Belfort Ruse", a deception plan supporting the battle for St Mihiel in 1918, likely did more to instill surprise-through-deception concepts in the World War II American military leaders than any other single event. The cast of characters and the chain of events surrounding this operation provided the primary basis for the American deception experience during the inter-war years. The battle for St Mihiel was the American Expeditionary Force's first all-American offensive of the Great War. General Pershing's goal was to eliminate the salient at St Mihiel and threaten Metz. The plan was designed to portray an American offensive through the Belfort Gap, in the upper Alsace, and to portray a ruse at St Mihiel, some 100 miles to the northwest.³⁷ Secrecy was of utmost importance, and only a very limited number from his staff were brought into the planning process. They included: Major General James W. McAndrew, the Chief of Staff; Brigadier General Fox Connor, the G-3; Colonel A. L. Conger, the G-2; and Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, Deputy G-3.³⁸ The deception effort at St Mihiel, was marginally successful from an operational perspective.

but likely had a lasting impact on the theoretical concept of surprise-through-deception for the American military. The "Belfort Ruse" provided an important educational tool for the inter-war period and directly inspired several of the principle participants of the Second World War.³⁹

Just as in the British inter-war experience, the theory of deception for the Americans would not be promoted to any great extent in the formal military doctrine. The techniques and procedures would again be passed from teacher to student. Colonel (at the time) George C. Marshall was assigned to the Infantry School as the Assistant Commandant from 1927-1931. There he refined the existing doctrine using the examples and experiences of the Great War. His efforts culminated in 1934 with a manual on Infantry in Battle. This classic work, while emphasizing surprise as a key and necessary element for victory, still only vaguely linked deception to the achievement of surprise. General Fox Connor became a teacher and mentor of a young Captain Dwight D. Eisenhower during the formative inter-war period. He is credited with providing this bright young officer with a valuable appreciation for operational and strategic concepts in warfare, using history as his textbook. As Rod Paschall suggests: "It would not be too far-fetched to assume that General Conner told his pupil of the deception operation for St Mihiel."⁴⁰ Eisenhower later served under General Pershing while assigned to the American Battle Monuments Commission for over a year and a half. While there, he completely edited General Pershing's accounts of the battles of San Mihiel and the Argonne. Eisenhower

met then-Colonel Marshall for the first time while working with the Commission.⁴¹

Other than the limited reference which is made to deception in support of surprise, as a minor part the U. S. Army's Counterintelligence doctrine of 1941, the Americans entered the war without a formal deception theory.⁴² The United States would have to rely heavily upon the British for their surprise-through-deception expertise, and the strategic deception planning for the European theater in World War II was largely left up to the British. Barton Whaley, in his extensive research on the subject of deception in the 20th century, states that: "I am unable to detect any deception planning originating in Washington until 1944, four months after the British had conclusively demonstrated its value in the Normandy landings."⁴³

This clearly is an overstatement based on the limited information available to Whaley in 1969. The subsequent release of formerly classified material indicates that there were several efforts to organize and operate a deception organization modeled along the same lines as the British. American deception operations prior to 1944 were controlled by the Joint Security Control (JSC), which was part of the Joint Planning Staff in Washington and answerable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In addition to cover and deception responsibilities, this section was concerned with all security operations and general wartime security for the JCS. In September 1942, British Colonels Bevan (London Controlling Section) and Clarke ("A" Force) traveled to the United States and briefed the JCS on their program. The Joint Security Control was formed, and

personnel were exchanged, with US Colonel William H. Baumer joining the London Controlling Section and British Lieutenant Colonel H. M. O'Connor attached to the JSC.⁴⁴ The organizational effort was significant, but the emphasis remained on security and as the senior member of the team, Major General Clayton Bissel, commented in 1945: "... while we have made some progress with deception . . . we still have a great deal to learn".⁴⁵

The Russians

"Operational Maskirovka, one of the basic means for achieving surprise, must be based upon the principles of Aktivnost' (activity), naturalness, diversity and continuity, and includes secrecy, imitation, demonstrative actions and disinformation"⁴⁶

Vyshee Kommandovanie (Higher Commands), 1924, Official Russian directive for front, army and field commanders.

The Russian term for deception is maskirovka, which for the purposes of this study will be considered synonymous with deception. A literal translation would most closely approximate the French term "camouflage"; however, a more correct interpretation would be the traditional term - stratagem. Just as in the western concept, a strong linkage exists between maskirovka and surprise; and Russian doctrine considers maskirovka to be applicable at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war. Russian deception theory has evolved from a physical (concealment) concept to a more intellectual concept over the course of the 20th Century. Russian

writings of the 1920's and 1930's reflected a utility for deception primarily at the tactical and operational level.⁴⁷ The value of achieving surprise was likewise consistent throughout these early writings, but again in support of lower level operations.

In a 1937 document (Military Thought), surprise and deception were clearly linked to a higher level of warfare; and the Russians began to recognize the value of large-scale deception planning. The Russian theorists carefully followed the German operations of the pre-war period. They were especially impressed with the technological surprise the Germans had achieved in their early expansionary moves and in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. German mechanized forces and doctrine, their use of air power, and the destructive potential of the U-boat were but some of the surprises which influenced the Russians. The German movements into Poland and France, in 1939 and 1940, demonstrated their capability to employ effective deception at the strategic level. While this did not go unnoticed by the Russians, the potential for its use against the Red Army was not widely recognized, especially by Stalin.⁴⁸ The surprise invasion of June 1941 clearly demonstrated this fact.

There were many factors which supported the German's achievement of such a total surprise. Certainly the dramatic purge of the Russian High Command had some impact, as did the widely held opinion that Hitler would never desire a second major front, a situation which had led to the German defeat in the Great War. Barton Whaley, in his case study of the Barbarossa operation offers several conclusions. First he states that: "His (Hitler's) cunning

'ultimatum' stratagem served to eliminate ambiguity, making Stalin quite certain, very decisive, and wrong." Additionally he suggests that: "the art of deception was very imperfectly understood outside Germany at the time."⁴⁹ The German military at this time was the lone expert of the "scam". Hitler played the "confidence man" and the world was the "mark". The Russians, out of sheer desperation, began to organize their own strategic deception operations. They learned quickly and within a relatively short period of time, they were able to cause the Germans to consistently fall victim to deception.⁵⁰

The Germans

"Every action should be based on surprise . . .
Ruses and wiles of every kind ought to be
used to deceive the enemy."⁵¹

General Hans von Seeckt, 1933

The bitter lessons from the Palestine campaign of 1917 and from the Western Front in 1918 were not forgotten by the Germans during the inter-war years for two primary reasons. The first factor was the strong influence of General Hans von Seeckt, the architect of the German reconstruction effort. The second was the limitations of the Treaty of Versailles with respect to rearmament, which necessitated the use of stratagem to build the army covertly.⁵² Hitler seized an opportunity to exercise his new war machine by voluntarily deploying forces in support of the Spanish Civil War from 1936-1939. The deception in these instances was

designed to protect Germany from reprisals of the signatories of the treaty.⁵³

This widespread use of deception in the inter-war period set the stage for its use throughout the war. The Reichswehr's masterful introduction of new weapons and tactics kept Germany's opponents consistently off guard. Hitler bluffed his way into the Ruhr in 1936 and Czechoslovakia in 1938, and used surprise to annex Denmark, Norway and Poland in 1939. The blitzkrieg enabled him to quickly defeat France and the Low Countries in 1940, and he employed a massive deception campaign (Barbarossa) to totally surprise Russia and the rest of the world in 1941. The use of strategic deception greatly diminished as a tool of the German High Command after Barbarossa. Tactical and operational deception remained an organized function of the Abwehr (intelligence staff), but the planning effort was centralized under the control of the High Command of the Wehrmacht.⁵⁴

This system was very ineffective and provided relative few successes during the later years of the war. As General Hans von Greiffenberg testified in 1950: "a system of deception . . . requires . . . an organization which not only plans the operation but also directs its implementation as a whole and sees that all measures which have to be taken are coordinated with each other and directed toward a common goal. Germany lacked such an organization in World War II."⁵⁵ Hitler himself is generally considered to have personally initiated most deception operations. Thereafter, details were worked out independently, and coordination was generally

incomplete. Confusion and conflict were commonplace and resulted in reducing the effectiveness of the deception.

An exception to this generalization was the "Battle for the Ardennes" in the winter of 1944. This very successful deception totally concealed the German preparation for this major offensive. As described in General von Greiffenberg's testimony: "The deception (Ardennes Operation) was organized and carried out solely on a military basis. The operation had to be kept secret from everybody."⁵⁶ So effective was the cover that the "Gauleiter of Cologne" planned to spend Christmas with a mostly notional army.⁵⁷ The German High Command reverted back to its former service structure to plan and execute this large-scale deception. For other than the Ardennes offensive, Hitler's very centralized decision-making style generally caused significant difficulties throughout the later stages of the war, especially when it came to avoiding allied deception efforts.

THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

North Africa was the first active theater of war for the Allies in which surprise and deception were frequently used by both sides. The achievement of surprise-through-deception is a complicated task that involves a thorough plan, clever minds, sophisticated techniques, an understanding of one's adversary, and complete support from the highest levels of leadership. The manner in which all these variables came together in the Second World War is one of the great stories in military history. The value of strategic military

surprise and deception was clearly demonstrated by each of the major participants. A thorough examination of that conflict provides an excellent laboratory for the study of the art of surprise and deception. This section will highlight the campaign for North Africa, as it can be credited as the birthplace of modern surprise-through-deception techniques. The British experience will dominate the analysis, primarily due to the fact that they emerged from this campaign as the only true masters of the art.

Sidi Barrani, 9 December 1940 (Operation Compass)

The British, especially Winston Churchill, were badly in need of a decisive victory at this juncture of the war. On the home front, the Battle of Britain had taken its toll on the British military, and the subsequent Luftwaffe night-time air raids were eroding the spirits of the population. General Archibald P. Wavell was the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Command, a position he had held since August 1939. In the region at the time Italy declared war, the Italian forces significantly outnumbered the British troops in all major categories. Overall, Wavell's forces were about one-fourth the size of the Italians and were widely dispersed throughout the region. The circumstances facing Wavell in the late fall of 1940, as he prepared for offensive operations, clearly made the use of surprise and deception an absolute requirement as a compensation for weakness and as a force multiplier. He recognized he would desperately need every trick in his conjurer's bag to salvage any form of victory from this desperate situation. The experiences he had gained from the Palestine Campaign and refined during the inter-

war period would form an intrinsic part of his plan. Security was paramount, and the problems inherent to the region were most appropriately described: "as an intelligence officer's paradise and a security officers hell."⁵⁸

Wavell concluded that it would not be enough to conceal what he was about to do, but that he must convince the enemy he was up to something else. The deception story for Operation Compass was to portray a weakening of the forces along the front to create an expeditionary force to assist the Greeks. A complete array of complimentary actions were put into motion to support the concept. Embarkation preparation was begun to support a large deployment along with false radio traffic indicating the requisite withdrawal of forces. Misleading information was provided through diplomatic channels to the neutral Japanese consulate, with the assumption that it would be passed directly on to Rome and Berlin.⁵⁹ The direct impact of this effort was later realized, when it was disclosed that Rome had directed Graziani, the Italian Commander, to prevent the movement of British forces to Greece.⁶⁰ Other supporting tricks used against the Italians included dummy equipment and notional headquarters to simulate non-existent units, and false dust trails and feints to mislead the enemy about deployments.⁶¹

Wavell adopted another special technique to exploit the Italian Army's extended flank and the vast uninhabited Libyan desert. In the model of Lawrence's Arabs from the Palestine Campaign, Wavell formed the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). Major R. A. Bangold, an experienced desert fighter, was selected to lead the group of British and New Zealand volunteers. Their hit and run tactics forced the

Italians to reinforce remote garrisons along their entire flank and presented a threat to not only their lines of communication but also to their morale.⁶² Wavell writes to Mangold:

I should like to convey to the officers and others ranks under your command my congratulations and appreciation of the successful results of your patrols carried out by your unit in Central Libya.

I am aware of the extreme physical difficulties

A full report of your exploits has already been telegraphed to the War Office. . . . you will be making an important contribution towards keeping Italian forces in back areas on the alert and adding to the anxieties and difficulties of our enemy.

Yours sincerely, A. P. Wavell

The magnitude of the deception operations for Operation Compass convinced Wavell of the need for a special staff section to orchestrate all deception measures for the command. In a letter to the War Office he requested the assignment of Lieutenant Colonel Dudley Clarke to run the section.⁶³ This marked the official beginning of 'A' Force, a small but specialized group that would dominate the highly secretive deception espionage and counter-espionage efforts throughout the Mediterranean Theater. Ronald Lewin offers this in regard to the importance of 'A' force to the British war effort: "It was during these months of 1940 that the embryo took shape under Wavell in the Middle East of the organization later known as 'A' Force, which with the large central groups based in London, would ramify and expand until the whole

system achieved its finest hour and most elaborate coup by the total deception of the Germans before D-Day in 1944."⁶⁴

The importance of intelligence in deception operations is a well documented axiom. As a minimum the preconceptions, beliefs and collection capability of the enemy are fundamental to determining the target, the story and the approach. The deceiver must then have some idea that the target has taken the bait and be able to determine if the desired action is occurring. A critical element of this and future World War II deception efforts was the work of the code-breakers at Belchley Park. The breaking of the German and Italian cyphers was indispensable to the success of deception and all other operations throughout the war.⁶⁵ At this stage of the war, Belchley Park was reading between 80-90 percent of the Italian traffic, and this activity established beyond a doubt that no immediate German intervention in North Africa was likely. This creative use of intelligence provided a good picture of enemy troop dispositions and enabled Wavell to formulate a plan which confronted the Italians with a complete surprise.⁶⁶

Thorough deception and solid security enabled Wavell to achieve surprise at the battle of Sidi Barrani. A smaller force employing bold and innovative tactics had soundly defeated a far superior force. The techniques employed here had guaranteed victory and turned the tide of the campaign. The Italians lost 5 divisions at a cost to the British of only 500 casualties. The die had been cast for a series of surprise-through-deception operations which would continue throughout the War.

The advent of specialized deception planning staffs like "A" Force and the London Controlling Section (LCS), along with special troop units to build the dummies and operate the false radio links, were combined with an unprecedented intelligence effort consisting of double agents and high level decryption successes. Centralized control was a defining feature of the the British system from early 1941. With Wavell's guidance this mixture of diverse elements had been brought together for the first time in history to comprise an organized deception mechanism. The evolution of this model was contrived in a situation where the conditions of desperation and weakness were bywords for Wavell forces. During the next eighteen months, those conditions would be different; and as history has demonstrated, deception techniques would again be generally discarded for more conventional means at a great cost of manpower and equipment.

Alam Halfa, 31 August 1942

With the exception of a limited British effort during the Crusader operation (18 November 1941) and during Rommel's operation Double Red, the battle for Torbruk (20-21 June 1942), the North African Theater was void of significant or successful deception operations until the battle for Alam Halfa. Numerous factors can be cited to explain this circumstance, however, two clearly stand out. First, the arrival of General Erwin Rommel in February of 1941, provided the Axis powers with a strong and effective leader. He quickly became the legendary "Desert Fox" and

labeled "a very daring and skilful opponent, . . . and . . . a great general." by Churchill in the House of Commons.⁶⁷ Rommel consistently achieved surprise through the secret and private nature of his own intentions,⁶⁸ and he kept abreast of the British dispositions and intentions by reading the Black Code of the U.S. Military Attache in Cairo throughout 1941 and early 1942.⁶⁹ Second, a combination of Wavell's dismissal and the rapid growth of the deception effort resulted in a dilution in the effectiveness of "A" Force. The needs of the expanding military effort took their toll on the organization and for a short period resulted in the fragmentation of the responsibility for its efforts. A reorganization in March 1942 both enlarged and once again centralized "A" Force and all theater deception operations under Colonel Clarke.⁷⁰

The new Eighth Army Commander, Lieutenant General Montgomery, adapted a plan devised by Auchinleck to trap Rommel at Alam Halfa as he began his next and presumed final offensive of the campaign.⁷¹ The deception would have to be convincing, and the cover for the defensive preparations ironclad. To achieve this objective, two major plans were employed by the British. The first was to employ one of the double agents named Kondor, who was at the time thought to be a reliable German spy in Cairo. Johannes Eppler (Kondor) was a real German spy in Cairo living under an Arab identity, who was uncovered in early August. The circumstances of his capture enabled the British to impersonate him and continue his reporting to German OKW in Athens. Kondor issued a series of reports which painted the picture for Rommel that the British defenses along the Alam Halfa ridge were weak and vulnerable. This

confirmed Rommel's initial intelligence picture and along with his subsequent reports on the dispositions of a single armored division instead of three along the ridge caused Rommel to direct that Kondor be awarded the Iron Cross.⁷²

The second plan was to be a variation of the "Haversack Ruse". The terrain around the Alam Halfa ridge contained an area known as the Ragil depression, which contained sections of treacherous sands, impassible terrain for the armored vehicles of Rommel's Africa Corps. Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Brigadier De Guingand, an intelligence officer under Wavell, with the help of Colonel Clarke devised a scheme to encourage Rommel to attack directly into the soft sand.⁷³ A "going map" was prepared which falsely portrayed the suitable "going" terrain. The map was planted on a known German collaborator, "Major Smith," and he was directed to take a scout car towards the German lines. The vehicle encountered a minefield in the vicinity of the German lines and exploded. The Germans recovered the corpse and the false map.⁷⁴ The material played directly into Rommel's hands, and he notified Berlin that he would begin his offensive on the night of 30/31 August. Ultra confirmed that report and provided Montgomery the opportunity he desired.⁷⁵

Rommel attacked as planned and his forces were countered at every thrust. When his forces were finally able to turn north to attack the Alam Halfa ridge, they encountered the soft sands of the Ragil. His armored vehicles were mired in the sand and made easy targets for the RAF fighters. For three days, the British attacked the German forces with air and artillery. Finally on the 4th of September, Rommel ordered a general retreat and the battle for

Alam Halfa was over.⁷⁶ The results were that the Germans lost three times more men and equipment than did the British, with little hope for replacements. Rommel's last chance to take Cairo and the Suez Canal was gone. He had been tricked and he knew it, but he didn't know how. Kondor remained an active and viable means for deception, and the security surrounding the Enigma remained in tact.

Second Alamein, 23 October 1942 (Operation Lightfoot)

The effectiveness of the Middle East Command cover and deception program, which General Archibald P. Wavell had begun some 3 years earlier, was clearly demonstrated in the Second Battle of Alamein. A United States Army Staff report of 26 March 1944 in the European Theater of Operations records: "The staff of specialists he had formed under Colonel Dudley Clarke, known as "A" Force, supervised the maneuver of enemy forces by guile rather than force. An impressive record of success was crowned by the achievements of this force in the battle of El Alamein. There an elaborate "A" Force operation decoyed the enemy into concentrating his forces against a phantom threat, insuring the success of the real attack. Generals Alexander and Montgomery credited cover and deception with a major contribution to the victory."⁷⁷

Following the battle for Alam Halfa, a clear shift in momentum was possible for Montgomery's Forces. Plans were already well underway to drive the Axis forces completely out of Africa. The success of Operation Lightfoot would very much depend on the achievement of surprise, especially with regard to the timing and

scope of the offensive. The challenge for "A" Force was to convince Rommel and the German High Command that the attack would not occur until mid-November due to the pace and magnitude of the preparations. This would be especially difficult because the terrain around El Alamein was basically a flat plain which was under continuous observation from Rommel's positions.⁷⁸ The task as explained to Col Clarke by the Eighth Army Chief of Staff, General de Guingand, was to: "conceal 150,000 men with a thousand guns and a thousand tanks on a plain as flat and as hard as a billiard table, and the Germans must not know anything about it, although they will be watching every movement, listening for every noise, charting every track. Every bloody wog will be watching you and telling the Germans what you are doing for the price of a packet of tea. You can't do it, of course, but you've bloody well got to!"⁷⁹

Two basic plans were formulated for Operation Lightfoot, a tactical cover and deception plan (Bertram) and a closely related strategic deception (Treatment).⁸⁰ Bertram focused on misleading the enemy as to the place, the time, and the object of the attack; and Treatment attempted to portray that a major offensive would not occur in the western desert at all but would rather be directed towards Crete. A diverse and unconventional cast of characters formed the "A" Force team by this time in the war. Clarke had brought in Colonel Noel Wild, a clever Hussar as his deputy. In Clarke's absence he was to become the primary coordinator of the entire cover and deception operation for Lightfoot.⁸¹ Clarke had assembled the remainder of his crew from all walks of life that included a magician, a chemist, a film writer, an artist, and a

banker. Clarke, Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Barkas (a film set designer), Major Jasper Maskelyne (a conjuror), and his team devised a scheme that would allow the attacking force to move forward under camouflage so gradually that it would go without notice.⁸² The theatrical-like tactical plan was based entirely upon magic and illusions while employing the usual tight security cover. The visual deception techniques employed for Bertram were unprecedented and established the basis for operations that would be employed later in the war to support the invasions on the continent. At the strategic level, all means of feeding the Abwehr false information were employed. Even a notional conference for the principal leaders in the theater was arranged in Tehran for the 26th of October, three days after the planned attack, and was not canceled until the offensive was well underway.⁸³ Other similar theater social and sporting arrangements were made to compliment the strategic deception story.

Montgomery attacked on the 23rd of October, and the breakthrough occurred on the 4th of November. The German command was taken completely by surprise, and it was clearly a spectacular victory for the British. The Axis losses were estimated at nearly 60,000 men, while British losses were established at under 14,000.⁸⁴ Both Bertram and Treatment were total successes. So surprised were the Germans that the attack began with Rommel in Germany and the forces of the Africa Korps entirely out of position to effectively counter the offensive. The Africa Korps Chief of Staff, General Fritz Beyerlein, later credited Montgomery with superb coordination in his use of a mass of ingenious devices to dupe

the Germans into believing that the attack would come from the southern sector. He further commented that German intelligence was so thoroughly deceived that the high command had no advance warning of either the time or place of the attack.⁸⁵

The significance of the deception operations for Lightfoot was that they were the blueprint for all such plans to come. The bogus order of battle, double agent reports, false radio traffic, and simulated landing craft all supported the strategic plan; and, by combining them with the camouflage, dummy equipment, and the sonic devices of the tactical plan, a total and complete effort was achieved.⁸⁶ Ultra and the efforts of the decryption teams can not be understated at this point. The total confidence that the Germans held in the Enigma system and the rapid decryption and dissemination of the product by Bletchley Park had an immense impact on this and many like operations to come. The actors were assembled and rehearsed, the script was written, and the stage was set for beginning of the end of the German occupation of Europe.

Allied Landings in North Africa , 8 November 1942
(Operation Torch)

While the second battle of El Alamein was still raging and with Rommel's command in a confused general retreat, an Anglo-American invasion force of nearly 100,000 men and all their equipment were landing at three locations in North Africa. The largely American land forces and the largely British navy assaulted and occupied Casablanca, Algiers, and Oran.⁸⁷ Roosevelt and

Churchill knew that an offensive had to be mounted somewhere in the European theater before the end of 1942, partly to satisfy the Russians and to assure an American commitment to the Germany-first strategy.⁸⁸ The allied force commanded by General Dwight D. Eisenhower staged a vast fleet of ships in two countries, crossed thousands of miles of U-Boat patrolled ocean, and passed through the narrow Straits of Gibraltar with the loss of only one ship. Complete surprise as to where and when the attack would come was realized through a masterful triumph of strategic security and deception.⁸⁹

The task for the London Controlling Section (LCS) was twofold: First to convince the Germans that the threat of a northwest Europe attack was real to keep them from reinforcing in the Mediterranean or on the Russian front; and second, the real destination of the actual invasion (Torch) had to be concealed. The LCS, under newly-assigned Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Bevan, proposed a feint at the Pas de Calais for the first and the coast of Norway for the destination of Torch. The plan to feint across the Channel was named Operation Overthrow, and the notional attack on Norway was called Solo I.⁹⁰ Just as "A" Force had assembled a team of creative players, the LCS recruited a talented although limited crew with sufficient experience to attempt to implement the monumental task. It would not be until nearly a year later that they would become the effective element that confounded Hitler until the end of the war.

Operation Overthrow was to be implemented using visual displays and false rumors passed through the network of double agents. An especially effective agent was Garbo, a Spaniard who effectively established himself as a German agent and then offered

his services to the British as a double agent. After several attempts to join the British team, Garbo was finally accepted in February of 1942.⁹¹ Garbo was a major source of false information for the Abwehr by the fall of 1942. An actual amphibious exercise was scheduled in the Channel for October, and this had great promise for Bevan's mission. Although the exercise ultimately was canceled, the preparations were enough to convince the Germans that Overthrow was real. Field Marshal von Rundstedt's forces were kept on alert through November and did not dispatch any significant numbers of troops to either the Mediterranean or to the Russian front.⁹²

Solo I was only part of the cover story for Operation Torch. Several supporting plans for England, France, America, the Middle East, Dakar and Gibraltar were to be carefully orchestrated by the LCS to achieve the desired degree of surprise through ambiguity. The American effort was conducted through coordination with Joint Security Control. Although JSC was by nature primarily concerned with the security aspects of the effort, it did assist in the deception operations for the deploying ships. The Mediterranean portion of the deception for Torch was given to "A" Force for execution, and Dudley Clarke's team worked to explain the buildup at Gibraltar and the false destination of the Torch convoys. Again, the deception was complete, and the Germans were taken by surprise. The LCS performed adequately in spite of some of the problems that surrounded that organization early in its development. As David Mure puts it: "Poor Colonel Bevan had a faulty and woolly organization wished on him, to his eternal credit, he recognized the fact and corrected the worst of the faults before it was too late."⁹³

CONCLUSIONS

"This history (stratagem), however, has been forgotten; and today, particularly since World War II, stratagem has come to be widely treated as the modern invention and arcane province of intelligence services".⁹⁴

What is that we can learn from the experiences of a war that was fought over 50 years ago under circumstances much different than exist today? Can surprise be achieved through deception in a world of sophisticated collection systems? Do superpowers need to resort to such conservative measures? What are the enduring elements of surprise and deception doctrine?

As was pointed out at the beginning of this study, some of the most successful commanders acquired their skills through the study of history. Allenby was a student of the past with an understanding of the present and an eye for the future. The North African Campaign clearly disapproved the popular inter-war claim that surprise through deception as experienced in World War I would not be possible in a modern war. It is the author's conclusion that through the examination of historical events where deception played a significant role will enhance the development of current deception theory. Thus, the unprecedented successes of World War II may have application today.

The achievement of surprise through deception has repeatedly changed the course of warfare. Some will argue that the technological advances of collection systems and communications means has eliminated the opportunity today to achieve any degree of

surprise. A counter to that argument might conclude that the only way to achieve surprise in the high tech world is through deception. Clearly, there are many prominent examples in the post-World War II period.

Some will argue that surprise and deception are the tools of the weaker force, and historically that tendency has been demonstrated. Many effective deception operations resulted from a sense of desperation and vulnerability. Modern forces are increasingly interested in the preservation of combat power, and a feeling of necessity can be derived from that fact. Surprising the enemy can provide a margin of victory that achieves that end. This study has suggested that deceiving the enemy is a critical element of surprise.

Several recurring principles became evident in this study and deserve summarizing at this point:

- Intelligence collaboration is a key to success.
- Commanders' central involvement and vision are paramount.
- Leaders need to be imaginative and open to new ideas.
- There must be a feeling of necessity to drive the effort.
- More than any other factor, security is a common component that leads to success.
- It is generally easier to reinforce the enemy's previously-held perceptions than to mislead him through ambiguity.
- Always determine what you "want the enemy to do", not what you want him to think.

- Deception is an operations, not intelligence, responsibility, but the two elements must operate closely in coordination.

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